

CBSNews.com

Silicone Implants Yield Platinum

WASHINGTON, August 26, 2004

(AP) Researchers have found high concentrations of platinum in women who got silicone breast implants and in the children they bore and breast-fed afterward.

The type of platinum found in the women's blood and urine was different than the traces of regular platinum not uncommon in people's bodies. It was a highly reactive platinum, used to help turn silicon oil into the honey-like gel that lends a more natural feel to a breast implant.

Concentrations were up to three times higher than in women who didn't have breast implants, according to findings by S.V.M. Maharaj, a chemist at American University. Maharaj was scheduled present the findings Thursday to the American Chemical Society in Philadelphia.

Ernest Lykissa, a forensic and clinical toxicologist who co-authored the paper, said the study's sample size was small. But Lykissa said it fairly represented hundreds of women with implants he's studied over the years.

Women who had implants the longest recorded the highest platinum concentrations. The heavy metal was also found in bone marrow, where blood cells are made.

Distinct from platinum released by catalytic converters in cars, platinum in implants is treated with nitric and hydrochloric acids and becomes very reactive, Lykissa said. The heavy metal readily binds in the human body, especially to nerve endings, short-circuiting communication with the brain.

"You see green, but you perceive a full moon," he said. "All of a sudden, your brain system is not working right."

Some women developed nervous tics, had faulty perception, and impaired hearing and eyesight, he said.

Children born to women with implants had problems with eyesight and hearing, too, but those nervous system disorders may have been caused by something else, he cautioned.

The Food and Drug Administration in January stunned plastic surgeons when, contradicting the advice of its expert panel, it rejected Inamed's bid to reintroduce silicone breast implants. After safety concerns rose, the FDA banned such implants in 1992 for most patients.

In January, the drug regulatory agency asked Inamed for more details about what happens when silicone seeps from the implant.

Dan Cohen, a spokesman for Santa Barbara, Calif.-based Inamed, said the company would speak in detail about its formal reply, submitted to the FDA earlier this month.

But at the FDA's October 2003 advisory board meeting, the company briefly discussed platinum dispersion and concentration in implant patients. The company has tracked those patients for three years.

"It was not an issue that anyone dwelled on — either our presentation or the panel," Cohen said.

For its part, the FDA in 2002 surveyed scientific literature that indicated platinum leaks from implants into surrounding breast tissue. Researchers said they didn't find anything suggesting women had allergic responses to leached platinum.

Paul H. Wooley, director of research for orthopedic surgery at Wayne State University, said it's been suspected for at least a decade that heavy metals used in manufacturing might cause problems for women who receive implants.

"I'm not sure these questions have been answered because, in general, they haven't been asked," Wooley said. "For political reasons, working on breast-implant patients has been somewhat difficult to do."

By Diedra Henderson

©MMIV The Associated Press. All Rights Reserved. Th